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AUTHOR Bowman, Camille
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ABSTRACT

Mobil Oil's program of "advertorials," or company stances on controversial issues appearing in principal print media, has had several significant results since its inception in 1970. The professed reasons for this campaign were to give the company itself more visibility and to stir up discussion on issues affecting the public. The results include swaying the opinion leaders and the general public; playing a major role in the positive shift in attitude changes toward major oil companies; improving Mobil's image with the public; achieving the objective of building a reputation for Mobil as an outspoken, responsible company concerned about America's energy future and major social issues; and having a favorable influence on investors. (CRH)

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MOBIL'S ADVERTORIALS: A CASE STUDY IN ADVOCACY ADS

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION CENTER REPORT NO. 492

This report was written by Camille Bowman, a Master's candidate at the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

On Thursday, Oct. 19, 1970, Mobil Oil Corporation began a longstanding advocacy advertising campaign with its first quarter-page advertisement on the op-ed page of the **New York Times**. Mobil's advertisement appeared in the lower corner of the page opposite the editorials. The headline read: "America has the world's best highways. And the world's worst mass transit. We hope this ad moves people...." The copy read:

> In recent years, the United States has developed a really superb highway system. It's been built with tax revenues earmarked specifically for road building.
>
> But the highway construction boom has been accompanied by a mass transit bust. Train and bus travel in this country, with few exceptions, is decrepit....
>
> You have to be a stoic with stamina to use public ground transportation for a trip beyond the commuting range....
>
> It costs less – in energy consumption and in money – to move people via mass transit than on highways. Thus, mass transit means less air pollution.
>
> It also means conservation.... So we think all forms of transportation should be brought into a national plan for safe, rapid, economical ways of moving people – consistent with the wisest use of our energy resources.
>
> While Mobil sells fuels and lubricants, we don't believe the gasoline consumed by a car idling in a traffic jam (carrying a single passenger, probably) is the best possible use of America's limited petroleum resources. Our products ought to help more people get where they want to go.

Surrounded by white space, Mobil's single-word logo emerged centered at the bottom of the advertisement.

Almost 14 years and hundreds of op-ed advertisements later, Mobil continues to use this familiar quarter-page "advertorial" format in the hope that its thought-provoking message will move people to debate.

Mobil's advocacy efforts began with the op-ed advertisement just described urging the development of the nation's public transportation system. In taking what many readers considered a novel stance, Mobil became the first major oil company to support publicly improved mass transportation. Since 1970, Mobil has spoken out via advocacy advertising on other controversial topics ranging from the need for the development of alternative energy sources and off-shore drilling to the First Amendment rights of business, media responsibility and restrictive environmental regulations.

"As for Mobil," president of Foote, Cone and Belding Communications, Inc., John O'Toole said (**Wall Street Journal**, 11-14-75), "they are the model of advocacy advertising. They had done it judiciously and stuck by their guns."

Mobil seeks to convert business issues into public issues and to stir up discussion through its advocacy campaign. In the process, Mobil, a catalyst for controversy, becomes the news. And Mobil, like the networks, has been from time to time accused of staging the news.[1]

Today, nine major newspapers and two news magazines carry Mobil's weekly op-ed series. Mobil's monthly "Observations" column reaches roughly 40 million American households and appears in more than 500 Sunday newspaper supplements across the country. Approximately one-quarter of Mobil's more than $20 million annual public affairs budget goes for advocacy advertising. Mary Springer, Mobil corporate public relations specialist, said Mobil spent somewhere around $4 million for print advertisements and about $1 million for TV commercials in connection with its advocacy advertising last year.[2]

Summary:

Mobil Oil Corporation's advertising program is probably the single most significant campaign of its kind ever undertaken. In this paper, the author examines the evolution of Mobil's celebrated 13-year advocacy advertising campaign.

CS 208 526

HOW MOBIL DEFINES ADVOCACY ADVERTISING

In the spring 1978 issue of Mobil's corporate magazine, **Overview**, Mobil Corporation Chairman Rawleigh Warner Jr. said:

> Mobil's corporate "advocacy" advertising is a program of paid advertising that addresses itself to important issues of public policy, especially issues that relate to our business of supplying energy.
>
> It has been largely this issue-oriented advertising that has set us apart from much of our own industry and from large corporations as a whole.[3]

How Mobil deals with the tax deductibility of its advocacy advertising also sets Mobil apart from other oil companies and corporations.

Educator Robert G. Meadow found seven major oil companies spent $59.8 million in goodwill advertising, or 47 percent of their total advertising budgets in 1974. Fifteen utilities spent $3.5 million or 55 percent of their total advertising budgets on goodwill advertising. Yet, of these totals, only $829,000 was reported as non-deductible political advertising.[4]

In 1974, Mobil Corporation was responsible for the $829,000 of reported non-deductible advertising expenditures. The $829,000 was part of Mobil's $11 million dollar total advertising budget.[5]

From these figures, Mobil, more than other corporations, appears to adhere to conservative standards when determining deductibility of expenses. Mobil also has testified before Congress that the intent of its corporate management is to declare any advocacy advertising or related advocacy expenses associated with issue-oriented matters as non-deductible.

In a telephone interview, Thomas DuBos, Mobil Corporation tax legislative counsel, said Mobil follows an established procedure for accumulating, identifying and recording all public affairs activities, including advocacy advertising. This procedure determines whether expenses are deductible or non-deductible.[6]

DuBos pointed out that Mobil has been careful to separate advocacy advertising and related expenses from other deductible advertising expenses. Any advertisement for Mobil products is tax deductible, he said. According to DuBos, Mobil's management seeks to void any suggestions that it attempts to influence the public on legislative matters at the taxpayer's expense. Mobil refers advertisements and other items that appear questionable as to deductibility to outside counsel. Mobil requests outside counsel to render their opinion using a four-group categorization from section 162 of the Internal Revenue Code.

Categories I, II and III are deductible while Category IV is non-deductible. A memorandum for DuBos prepared by Dewey, Ballantine, Bushby, Palmer and Wood, the outside law firm, set forth the following four categories:

Group I. Consists of institutional or "goodwill" advertising that promotes, or suggests, support for charitable or cultural causes such as the Red Cross, the arts, etc. The purpose is to keep Mobil's name before the public in a favorable light.

Group II. Consists of product-related materials, such as advertising relating to fuel conservation and automobile driving, maintenance and safety. These materials relate to Mobil's business.

Group III. Consists of all other materials except those that may be viewed as attempts to influence the general public, or segments thereof, with respect to a legislative matter. This group includes materials that present views on economic, financial, social, personal and other subjects of a general nature.

Group IV. Consists of advertising, publications and other materials containing messages that may be viewed as attempts to influence the general public, or segments thereof, with respect to a legislative matter.

Advocacy advertisements fall under Group IV. One example showing how Mobil's accountants categorize Mobil's advertisements and related public affairs items is provided in a letter DuBos forwarded to the author. Three out of the six items mentioned in the letter were non-deductible advocacy advertising expenses. Op-ed advertisements entitled "WHY DO WE BUY THIS SPACE?" and "BACK TO BASICS" and a bulletin board newsletter, "Petroleum Fee", fell within Group IV.

In the past Mobil's advertising expenditure figures have not always matched outside reports. Although Warner reported Mobil's op-ed campaign was costing $1.4 million a year by 1978, Common Cause researchers estimated Mobil's total expenditures for advocacy advertising had already exceeded $4 million by 1977.[7]

Mobil has yet to update its figures for advertising expenditures. DuBos stated in a letter, dated Nov. 29, 1983, he was still attempting to gather some of the data requested regarding advocacy advertising and non-deductible advertising.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

As early as 1969, before the energy crunch and the 1973 oil crisis surfaced, Mobil's management concluded from its vantage point that the oil industry was going to receive the worst across-the-board clobbering in its history. Mobil decision-makers felt the corporation had not only a right to engage in dialogue on public policy, but an obligation to do so.[8]

Corporate management set three initial goals for Mobil's advocacy advertising program. The first goal was to build a reputation as an outspoken, responsible company, concerned about America's energy future and major social issues.The second goal was to initiate debate on major public issues concerning Mobil. The third goal was to broaden the spectrum and viewpoints available to the American people. Mobil wanted the public to understand its viewpoints on public policy and ultimately support them.[9]

In Mobil's view, there was no practical alternative to speaking up publicly. Warner even communicated Mobil management's belief that it was no great exaggeration to say Mobil had to "publish or perish." And Mobil did not intend to perish, Warner added, if management could help prevent it.[10]

Herbert Schmertz, Mobil's vice president for public affairs, repeatedly has spoken out on why in 1970 Mobil decided a low-profile strategy was unacceptable. In the May /June 1983 **Communicator's Journal**, he said:

> It seemed that enormous, external forces were already buffeting our company and our industry. We believed these forces would do enormous and irreparable damage unless we recognized their existence and attempted to counter them....
>
> A powerful environmental lobby had emerged, and politicians and the press could not leap on that bandwagon fast enough. Nor did they pay attention to the costs of near-pristine air and water... There was also a growing awareness on the part of Mobil executives that in the very near future, this nation and the world would start to experience energy shortages. And....rapidly depleting supplies of domestic crude oil would very quickly lead to an escalating reliance on foreign oil.
>
> The press and the public, at that time, were both unaware and uninterested in the domestic supply problem. And because of the other forces mentioned, the opportunities and incentives for more extensive development of America's domestic energy base were severely curtailed.
>
> We at Mobil felt we had to find ways to urge public policies that would allow the United States to avoid unnecessary and damaging dependence on foreign energy sources.[11]

One of the major threats to the oil industry, Mobil believed, was the electronic news media's inability to handle complex issues well in their newscasts. Mobil held that the structure of TV news didn't encourage real understanding of complex energy issues.[12]

Remarks made by Schmertz on Oct. 15, 1980, to the Media Institute gave the impression that Mobil has not significantly altered its view of television news. Schmertz said that Mobil has found the print media easier to work with than television. That's not because print reporters are necessarily nicer or smarter, Schmertz said, but because of the nature of television. He also said TV reporters could learn something from print journalism, because print reporters generally have space to develop complicated ideas while television newscasters operate under the tyranny of the 25-second bite. He said the television personality, alias Mr. Investigatory or Mr. Pundit or Master of the Put-Down, usually raises fear in the heart of the business person, not to mention the hackles on the back of his or her neck. While newspapers accept letters to the editor, print corrections and even run advocacy advertisements, television media – particularly the networks – are unaccustomed to practicing print journalism's open habits, Schmertz said. In closing, Schmertz offered several important steps the media could take to diminish the current adversary relationship between business and the media.

The most obvious and important principle, Schmertz said, was that the basic purpose of journalism should be to inform. Information can best be solicited from the business community in an atmosphere free of cat-and-mouse games, Schmertz said. Journalists have to rediscover the objectivity that used to be their stock in trade, he said, and free themselves of the "I-make-the-news-report" syndrome. He concluded that when journalists start to move in that direction, they will gladly be met halfway by business, "and the real gainers won't be business, or the media, but a better-informed American public."[13]

Although Mobil's first op-ed ad ran in the **New York Times** in 1970, the advertisements sporadically appeared from time to time until the end of 1971. Beginning Thursday, Jan. 13, 1972, Mobil's op-ed advertisements have appeared without interruption.[14] On April 1, 1982, Mobil ran the op-ed advertisement answering the question headline, "WHY DO WE BUY THIS SPACE?" The answer:

> For more than 11 years now, we've been addressing Americans with weekly messages in principal print media. We've argued, cajoled, thundered, pleaded, reasoned and poked fun. In return, we've been reviled, revered, held up as a model and put down as a sorry example.
>
> Why does Mobil choose to expose itself to these weekly judgments in the court of public opinion?...
>
> Our answer is that business needs voices in the media, the same way labor unions, consumers and other groups in our society do. Our nation functions best when economic and other concerns of the people are subjected to rigorous debate. When our messages add to the spectrum of facts and opinion available to the public, even if the decisions are contrary to our preferences, then the effort and cost are worthwhile....

The last paragraph of the advertisement summarizes why Mobil continues to create op-ed advertising:

> We still continue to speak on a wide array of topics, even though there's no immediate energy crisis to kick around anymore. Because we don't want to be like the mother-in-law who comes to visit only when she has problems and matters to complain about. We think a continuous presence in this space makes sense for us. And we hope, on your part, you find us informative occasionally, or entertaining, or at least infuriating. But never boring. After all, you did read this far, didn't you?

HOW MOBIL'S ADVOCACY ADVERTISING PROGRAM WORKS

Although Mobil's advocacy efforts include broadcast, print media are still on the cutting edge of Mobil's advocacy advertisement. There are three kinds of print advertisements.

Mobil refers to its op-ed advertisements as "Mobil's rifle," aimed at a small, select target audience. Mobil seeks to influence the influencers with op-ed advertisements appearing on a regular basis in nine major newspapers. They are: **New York Times, Washington Post, Denver Post, Boston Globe, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, Dallas Morning News, Houston Post** and **Wall Street Journal.** Mobil's op-ed advertisements also appear on a regular basis in

Time and **Economist.**

The op-ed advertisements, the mainstay of Mobil's advocacy program, are aimed primarily at opinion leaders, specifically politicians in Washington and in state governments; editors, producers and commentators in all media; educators; members of the business establishment; and intellectuals.[15] Schmertz said (**Wall Street Journal**, 4-10-73) that instead of running the standard ad, offering only conclusions, Mobil lays itself bare in an attempt to stimulate debate. He said Mobil tries to communicate its deep intellectual commitment to each op-ed subject by exploring the thinking behind its conclusions and the philosophy upon which it's based. The op-ed headlines indicate Mobil enjoys speaking its mind, arguing its case and piquing the reader's curiosity. A selection of such headlines follows:

- The Customers Always Write.
- For Every Problem There Is A Solution. Simple, Neat and Wrong.
- 212-989-7600: The Call of the Riled.
- Let's Get Our Oil Off the Shelf.
- Public Land vs. The Public Welfare.
- And Now, A Message the Networks Keep Ignoring.
- No Nukes Is Bad News.
- A Whale Of An Oil Crisis.
- A 21-Year Fiasco.
- Who's Listening to the People of Lebanon?
- The Myth of the Crusading Reporter.
- The Myth of the Open Airwaves.

A June 30, 1981, United Press International press release reported that a Mobil company official in New York said Mobil spends $2.5 million yearly on the op-ed ads, about a tenth of its $21 million radio and newspaper advertising expenditures.[16]

In 1975, Mobil added what it terms its "shotgun" or "Observations" advertisements to appeal to a broader popular audience. Still, using essentially the same themes with "Observations" as it uses in the op-ed advertisements, Mobil continues to popularize the column. Cartoons and woodcuts are used in the "Observations" advertisements to attract reader attention. Beginning with boldface subheads, individual human interest paragraphs appear in a gossip-column conversational style format.[17]

The "It's a Fact" box, located directly above Mobil's logo in "Observations" advertisements, often contains newsworthy energy information. Two examples are "Nuclear power, for the first time, has surpassed oil in the amount of electricity it produces in the U.S.," and "While the number of wells drilled for **decontrolled** crude rose 30 percent in 1981 compared to 1980, the number of wells drilled for still-controlled natural gas edged up only about 7 percent in 1981."[18]

"Observations" advertisements appear monthly in the Sunday supplements, **Parade** and **Family Weekly**, and in numerous other newspapers. Until recently, the two-column tabloid advertisements have appeared on a bi-weekly basis.[19]

In Mobil's third category of advocacy advertisements are special full-page advertisements, usually created to "set-the-record-straight and right-the-wrongs" against Mobil. Special advertisements deal with what Mobil considers critical issues important enough to warrant full-page treatment.[20]

It should be noted that a hallmark of Mobil's advocacy advertising program is painstaking research and quick response. Mobil takes elaborate precautions to avoid factual errors, and corporate management actively participates in the development of advocacy advertising copy.[21]

Timeliness is important to advocacy advertising's effectiveness. A six-member in-house team writes most of Mobil's copy, but on occasion, corporate brass have been known to create hard-hitting op-ed and special full-page advertisements.[22]

There are memorable examples of special full-page advocacy advertisements in the **New York Times** and other newspapers. They carry banner headlines like "How CBS on October 24, 1979 Prefabricated the News"; "19 Dull and Unsensational Facts about Our Profits the TV Networks Didn't Tell You and Won't Allow Us to Tell You"; "ABC-TV's '20/20' Needs Its Eyes Examined" and "Whatever Happened to Fair Play."

Examples of full-page special advocacy advertisements appear in the exhibits section of a 43-page Mobil booklet entitled "The Energy Crisis and The Media: Some Case Histories." Mobil executives prepared the booklet to help other business executives learn from Mobil's first-hand experience how to deal with the media, specifically when the media either inadvertently or intentionally misrepresented business. Schmertz originally presented the paper in 1977 to the Business International Chief Executive Officers' Round Table and the case histories deal with a three-year period from 1973 to 1976. Schmertz's introduction prepares the reader for an in-depth analysis of Mobil's continued outspoken approach to advocating its viewpoint on controversial issues affecting Mobil with the media. He says:

> During the last decade, the American business community has come under very close scrutiny from a variety of outside sources, including government, consumerists, ecologists and the media. The result has been an increase in regulation, a decrease in public confidence in big business and growing misunderstanding and criticism of the free enterprise system. Industry's willingness and ability to speak out forcefully to protect itself and its shareholders' interests have become paramount to survival...
>
> It is not an easy task.[23]

The five case histories, complete with exhibits, are: "The Tanker Myth"; "ABC and the National News Council Complaint"; "Television and Free Access"; "Mobil and the New York Times"; and "WNBC-TV and 'The Great Gasoline Debate'."

Over the years, Mobil's advertisements have sparked debate among a wide variety of opinion leaders. Former President Jimmy Carter was so riled by Mobil's opposition to his decontrol program of natural gas that he branded Mobil "perhaps the most irresponsible company in America." Instead of declaring a cease-fire, Mobil continued its advocacy advertising against Carter's energy policy. Warner responded to Carter's angry remark by saying, "We don't deserve it, and we didn't earn it, but we had the temerity to

disagree with his energy policy and I'm proud of it."[24]

Besides disagreeing with Carter on foreign tax credits and the windfall profits tax, Mobil has verbally battled Sen. Thomas Eagleton on corporate profits; Sen. Howard Metzenbaum on antitrust; former New Jersey Energy Commissioner Joel Jacobson on a number of topics; Columbia Law School professor Peter Strauss on the environment; and even entertainer Robert Redford on solar energy.[25]

Mobil's fourth category of advocacy advertising features two types of television commercials, the "Mobil Information Service Network" and the "Fables for Now" series. In 1980, Mobil produced and aired television versions of oped advertisements billed as the "Mobil Information Service Network." Mobil spokesmen, resembling newscasters, delivered the two-minute editorial commercials. Though never seen on a network television, the series ran on more than 70 independent stations' evening news programs two or three times a week and reached approximately 25 million households a month.[26]

MOBIL'S CONTINUING CONTROVERSY WITH THE NETWORKS

In 1977, Mobil organized its own Mobil Showcase Network, composed of some 50 stations, including approximately 40 ABC, CBS or NBC affiliates. These stations cut off regular programming to carry Mobil-produced television specials and advocacy commercials. In 1980, the six-episode "Edward and Mrs. Simpson" special first carried the imaginative Mobil "Fables" advertisements. These "Fables for Now" feature dancers and mimes masquerading as animals. They creatively defend private enterprise and the oil companies' high profits, and they warn against big government strangulation.[27]

Only a few days before broadcasting the first "Edward" segment, three **Post-Newsweek** stations told Mobil the fables violated their ban against advocacy commercials.[28]

A **Post-Newsweek** spokesman explained, "We do not sell time for advertising on issues of a public affairs nature."[29] However, Mobil contended the **Post-Newsweek** management was engaging in censorship under the guise of the Fairness Doctrine and denying viewers the opportunity to see the fables — regardless of whether or not they agreed with them. Mobil also argued that most Americans wouldn't find Mobil's pro-business, anti-regulatory positions very controversial. Schmertz pointed out that the Fairness Doctrine's vagueness allowed three stations to reject Mobil's "Fables" and more than 50 others to carry them.[30]

Thomas Cookerly, WJLA general manager of the ABC affiliate in Washington, chose to carry "Edward and Mrs. Simpson." In an interview with Joel Swerdlow, Cookerly said:

> It's our responsibility to get into issue advertising. Of course it's difficult to make sure there's a fair balance. But too many broadcasters are turning their backs, saying, "We'll cover the issues with our news broadcasts." Then they don't get covered at all.[31]

Andrew Jay Schwartzman, executive director of Media Access Project, a communications public interest law firm, said: Profitability has been well covered in each network's news programs. Once again, the networks are using the Fairness Doctrine as a scapegoat."[32] In the same article, Schmertz claimed the network's policies have reduced opportunities for debate on public issues.

Schmertz told the **Florida Times-Union** that the **Post-Newsweek** stations' management was misinterpreting the Fairness Doctrine. The doctrine should come into play, Schmertz said, when an issue hadn't been aired by a station for an extended period of time. He added that the stations already were in violation if the various points of view on these issues hadn't previously come into play.[33]

A **San Francisco Chronicle** TV critic wrote, "I would like to think that the American public is bright enough to understand the source of these commercials and accept them as another viewpoint in a continuing discussion. Or merely enjoy them as the best thing to happen to TV advertising within memory."[34]

One of the "Fables" received two Clio awards, but Mobil doubts it will be able to persuade the networks to change their policies.[35]

The Fairness Doctrine provides that a station must present abalanced overview of controversial issues. However, it doesn't require that each commercial be answered by another commercial. Even so, Mobil has given the networks a long-standing offer to pay for two network commercials – one commercial Mobil would use; the other could be used by a spokesman representing the opposing viewpoint. Mobil agrees the networks could choose their own spokesman.[36]

If the networks were concerned about Mobil setting the agenda for debate, Schmertz had another suggestion: "We'll limit our ads to simply correcting the errors on the evening news."[37]

As far back as 1973, Warner wrote that Mobil was complaining to former CBS president Frank Stanton about alleged mistakes made by the CBS evening news. And 1974 brought more problems with the networks for Mobil. It was reported that (**Wall Street Journal**, 5-14-75) when Mobil complained to the National News Council about ABC's special, "Oil: The Policy Crisis." Mobil's 22-page analysis cited 32 allegedly "inaccurate or unfair" statements in the show. The National News Council eventually ruled that the ABC broadcast hadn't made any "significantly misleading factual statements," but did lack the "balance and fairness" viewers were led to expect.

In 1974, Mobil designed a commercial that Schmertz termed "the all-time, all-weather, year-round, indoor-and-out champion for blandness." The camera focused on waves lapping against an uninhabited beach as an announcer said:

> According to the U.S. Geological Survey, there may be 60 million barrels of oil or more beneath our continental shelves. Some people say we should be drilling for that oil and gas. Others say we shouldn't because of the possible environmental risks. We'd like to know what you think. Write Mobil Poll, Room 647, 150 E. 42nd St., New York, N.Y., 10017. We'd like to hear from you."

Only NBC agreed to run the commercial without

change. CBS said to Mobil in a letter:

> We regret that the subject matter of this commercial...deals with a controversial issue of public importance and does not fall within our "goals and services" limitation for acceptance.

ABC also refused to accept the commercial.

Rather than air the commercial on NBC, Mobil chose to run a special full-page advocacy advertisement showing its proposed visuals and text together with the three network replies.[38]

In 1980, Mobil tried to buy time for a one-minute television commercial stating Mobil's 1979 profits ($2.01 billion) were high, but not as high as ABC's, CBS's and NBC's when evaluated by return on equity.[39]

Mobil protested to NBC because Ralph Nader was given a one-shot chance to speak satirically on behalf of big business on "Saturday Night Live." NBC offered Schmertz equal time on that program, but he turned them down because he didn't believe a satirical show was the proper forum for politicians, corporate executives or Ralph Nader. Schmertz said he finally asked NBC if the network would run a message under Nader's face, saying, "The person you are watching is a comedian."[40]

To keep up with any news relating to the oil industry, Mobil spends more than $400,000 a year on an informational-retrieval, news-monitoring operation it calls the Secretariat. Mobil staff members monitor the Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters and Dow Jones wire services. They also record television news and special programming related to the oil industry.[41]

MOBIL'S CORPORATE PERSONALITY

The words of Donald S. Stroetzel, Mobil Oil Corporation communications program manager, reflect Mobil's corporate personality:

> We believe business needs to make its case in the media, even at the risk of being called a "big mouth" by the more timid souls.
>
> The aim of our advocacy ads is not to make people love Mobil. We consider our ads successful if they contribute to the national dialogue, if they cause people to say, "Maybe there is another side." We look to our ads to provide intellectual stimulation to the folks supporting us, to win over some of the undecideds and to make our opponents more cautious with charges that often are more wild than factual.[42]

Schmertz said (**Wall Street Journal**, 5-14-75) Mobil's commitment to diversity of opinion and to quality television programming reflects the different facets of Mobil's personality. Schmertz didn't like the suggestion Mobil advertises to improve the company's image, and he refused to confirm that Mobil's motives could be as crass as manufacturing goodwill. He also said:

> While many attempt to denigrate Mobil's support of public television by characterizing it as the "Petroleum Broadcasting Service," any fair-minded history of the past 12 years would show that Mobil's leadership has brought a large increase in the audience for public television, a large increase in individual contributions to public television and a large influx of corporate support

Mobil actively recruits audiences for programs it sponsors on public television through op-ed advertisements, press kits, conferences and posters on trains and subways. Some say that Mobil's early and continued sponsorship of "Masterpiece Theatre" and its support of public television specials have given Mobil the necessary credibility and stature to publicly present its views on controversial issues.[43]

When public television was still an emerging institution, Mobil's management chose to play an active leadership role in its development. In 1970, Mobil's $1 million commitment to PBS was the largest ever made. In 1982, Mobil contributed more than $3 million to PBS. Mobil looks upon its advocacy efforts as investments to help build a strong, pluralistic society. However, not all Mobil's advocacy efforts involve advocacy advertising.[44]

Mobil is currently involved in investing more than $600,000 over a three-year period to bring drama, music and dance to inner-city students. During the summer of 1982, Mobil supported almost $1 million worth of job programs for New York, Chicago and Dallas youths.[45]

Few corporations, if any, rival Mobil in its aggressiveness and consistency in its advocacy efforts. Mobil defends its political and charitable interests articulately and conscientiously. Whenever advocacy advertising is discussed, Mobil's name is mentioned first. An International Advertising Association study states Mobil's advocacy program is acclaimed as the single most significant campaign of its nature ever undertaken, regardless of country.[46] Rawleigh Warner Jr. was named "Adman of the Year" in 1975 by **Advertising Age** editors for Mobil's advocacy advertising efforts. Five years later, an **Advertising Age** editorial about Mobil said:

> In a world where the media have no obligation to tell anyone's story in his words and according to his liking, Mobil demonstrated that paid ads can become an important forum enriching the debate of public issues.
>
> Like other effective crusaders, Mobil is driven by conviction.[47]

The same editorial also suggested that perhaps Mobil had overplayed its hand. The columnist questioned what Mobil was trying to achieve when it offered a spot to the networks showing Mobil's profits exceeded by the networks.[48]

Mobil's numerous critics are quick to condemn the company. One major oil competitor (**Wall Street Journal**, 5-14-75) found Mobil's aggressive campaign "a little unseemly." He said he saw no reason to annoy the public or the people in Washington as Mobil does. He agreed there was a need for dialogue in today's difficult times, but he didn't believe Mobil had to be quite so aggressive.

Robert Sherrill, White House correspondent for **Nation**, attacked the **New York Times** for selling Mobil's gimmickry

on its "precious 'op-ed' page."[49] In a guest commentary in **Advertising Age**, Ralph Nader said:

> Most critics of image/idea/issue advertisements challenge their legitimacy, deductibility and accuracy. From the public relations side, there have also been doubts expressed. Loet Velmans, president of Hill & Knowlton, said of the Mobil ads in 1970: "What's the audience? Is Mobil speaking to the converted? I don't know who they're talking to." And Craig Lewis of Earl Newsom & Co. noted that Mobil's advocacy campaign "has gotten attention for the company but has not advanced the cause of the oil industry significantly. The tone of the ads has gotten too peevish."
>
> Certainly, Mobil incurred greater ill will, if not antagonism, by the Carter administration. President Carter called Mobil irresponsible. Members of Congress used stronger language in private. Mobil has succeeded in alienating more media barons than any consumer group could have ever anticipated possible. But then, why should Mobil care? With more than $60 billion in annual sales, the company may think it is in the position of the 800-pound gorilla – able to sleep anywhere it wants.[50]

Syndicated columnist Tom Wicker has called advocacy advertising "pious, self-serving, devious, mealymouthed, self-exculpating, holier-than-thou and positively sickening." There is no shortage of available evidence to prove Mobil's advocacy advertising both detested and respected.[51]

Studies conducted in the late 1970s acknowledge Mobil's commitment to advocacy advertising has brought it a high level of public awareness. The many studies and surveys conducted between 1970 and 1980 provide evidence that Mobil's advocacy program has:

- Had a substantial impact on opinion leaders and the general public.
- Played a major role in the positive shift in attitude toward the oil companies.
- Helped to improve Mobil's image with opinion leaders and the public.
- Achieved the objective of building a reputation for Mobil as an outspoken, responsible company concerned about America's energy future and major social issues.
- Had a favorable influence on investors.[52]

Surprisingly, Schmertz does not put much stock in surveys questioning the effectiveness of advocacy advertising. He is, however, a long-time champion of advocacy advertising in its purest sense:

> What we're after is an intellectual level of debate on issues that affect the environment in which companies do business – price controls, allocation of gasoline, nuclear development. Years ago we were talking in the wilderness. Today, these are mainstream issues.[53]

CONCLUSION

Perhaps if the late A.J. Liebling were alive today, he still would say freedom of the press is limited to those who own one. However, Mobil's track record seems to contradict Liebling's cynicism. Lewis Banks in the **Atlantic Monthly** gives Mobil credit:

> Mobil's editorial insistence has brought about new facts to the public debate on energy, and in the process has influenced editorial thought and political action.[54]

Without doubt, the debate on advocacy advertising will continue. In the meantime, Mobil will be riding herd on the media and stirring up debate with op-ed advertisements such as a recent series entitled, "Are the Media Giving Us the Facts?"

FOOTNOTES

1. Joel Swerdlow, "Mobil Refused Network Access Once Again," **Washington Journalism Review**, March 1980, p. 11.
2. Telephone interview with Mary Springer, Mobil Corporation public relations specialist, October 19, 1983.
3. Rawleigh Warner Jr., "Speaking Out: If We Don't Do It, Who Will?" **Overview**, Spring 1978, p. 1.
4. Robert Meadow, "The Political Dimensions of Non-Product Advertising," **Journal of Communications**, Summer 1981, p. 72.
5. Joseph Seldin, "Who Pays for the Image? " **Nation** "Mobil," **Fortune**, September 1976, p. 110.
6. Telephone interview with Thomas DuBos, Mobil Corporation tax legislative counsel, November 22, 1983.
7. Oscar Gandy Jr., **Beyond Agenda Setting: Information Subsidies and Public Policy** (New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Company, 1982), p. 71.
8. Warner, "Speaking Out," p. 1.
9. Mobil Corporation, "The Effectiveness Of Mobil's Op-ed Campaign," undated press release, p. 12.
10. Warner, "Speaking Out," p. 1.
11. Herbert Schmertz, "Advocacy Has Its Rewards," **Communicator's Journal**, May/June 1983, p. 17.
12. Herbert Schmertz, "The Energy Crisis and the Media: Some Case Histories," remarks before the Business International Chief Executives Officer's Round Table, p. 7.
13. Herbert Schmertz, vice president, public affairs, Mobil Corporation, before the Media Institute, October 15, 1980, pp. 2-7.
14. Irwin Ross, "Public Relations Isn't Kid-Glove Stuff at Mobil," **Fortune**, September 1976, p. 110.
15. Remarks by Donald Stroetzel, manager of communications programs, Mobil Oil Corporation, before the Fall Staff Conference of the National Advertising Network, October 1, 1981, p. 4.
16. Schmertz, "The Energy Crisis," p. 1.
17. Arnold Barban and Watson Dunn, **Advertising: Its Role in Modern Marketing** (New York: The Dryden Press, 1982), p. 370.
18. Schmertz, "Advocacy Has Its Rewards," pp. 17-18.
19. Telephone interview with Mary Springer, November 21, 1983.
20. Stroetzel, pp. 5-6.
21. Ibid., pp. 6-7.
22. Stephen Kliment, "Advocacy Advertising by U.S. Corporations: Can Money Buy Friends?" **Madison Avenue**, February 1981, p. 32.
23. Schmertz, "The Energy Crisis," p. 1.
24. Edwin McDowell, "Bridging the Communications Gap, **Saturday Review**, September 29, 1979, p. 16.
25. "The Effectiveness of Mobil's Op-ed Campaign," p. 12.
26. Telephone interview with Michael Gross, Mobil Corporation public relations specialist, December 1, 1983.
27. "Sponsorship and Censorship," **Time**, February 11, 1980, p. 67.
28. Swerdlow, "Mobil Refused Network Access," p. 11.
29. Ibid.
30. "Sponsorship and Censorship," p. 67.
31. Swerdlow, "Mobil Refused Network Access," p. 12.
32. Ibid.
33. "Sponsorship and Censorship," p. 67.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Randall Poe, "Masters of the Advertorial," **The Conference Board**, September 1980, p. 23.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., pp. 23-24.
39. Ibid., p. 24.
40. Ibid., p. 25.
41. Ross, "Public Relations," p. 199.
42. Donald S. Stroetzel, "Why Mobil Uses Advocacy Advertising ," **Public Affairs Review**, 1982, p. 32.
43. Ibid., p. 33.
44. Telephone interview with Mary Springer.
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46. Poe, "Masters of the Advertorial," p. 15.
47. "Troubled Waters For Oil Spots," **Advertising Age**, February 11, 1980, p. 20.
48. Ibid.
49. Poe, "Masters of the Advertorial," p. 15.
50. Ralph Nader, "Challenging the corporate ad," **Advertising Age**, January 24, 1983.
51. Poe, "Masters of the Advertorial," p. 15.
52. "Effectiveness of Mobil's Op-Ed Campaign," pp. 9-10.
53. McDowell, "Bridging the Communications Gap," p. 16.
54. "Effectiveness of Mobil's Op-Ed Campaign," p. 11.

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